

Appropriate terminology use in Reconciliation Groups



Reconciliation
QUEENSLAND
Incorporated

All language and terms associated with people, events and objects will change over time. Languages are dynamic and some terms used in the past are no longer acceptable in current times. It is important to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from your local area to understand the preferred terms associated with reconciliation processes. Here is a starting point ...

- **When describing Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal peoples and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are the preferred terms. Aborigine and Aboriginal are outdated terms and can often offend some Aboriginal people. Islander should only be used if preferred by local Torres Strait Islander peoples. The acronyms ATSI or A&TSI should never be used.**
- The term *Indigenous* should only be used when accompanied by the word *Australian*. *Indigenous Australian* refers to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person from Australia it does not include Indigenous peoples from other countries. Some Indigenous Australians prefer to be called this term, others prefer Aboriginal person, or Torres Strait Islander person, others prefer language group names or nations such as Gubbi Gubbi, Gamilaraay, Miriam Mer etc. Please consult with local community and individuals in discussing preferred descriptions.
- The word “*Aboriginal*” and the words “*Torres Strait Islander*” should always be written using capitals.
- The terms *half-caste*, *quarter-caste*, *part-Aboriginal*, *full blood* or similar are highly offensive and should never be used. Identity is complex and this complexity and diversity should be understood and recognised.
- The term *tribe* is an outdated term and preference is given to other words to describe the collective identities of Indigenous Australians. Some more appropriate terms include; *group*, *family*, *country*, *nation*, *language group* or *cultural group* rather than the word.
- Some Aboriginal people and some Torres Strait Islander people prefer terms such as *traditional* to describe particular knowledges and cultural practices. The term *tribal* is no longer acceptable.
- *The Dreaming* is a non-Indigenous word that has been used to describe holistic Aboriginal belief systems and knowledges related to ways of living, creation, ongoing connection with ancestors, the spiritual world and the rights and responsibilities to the land, seas, waterways and each other. *Dreaming*, or *The Dreaming* is preferred to *Dreamtime* as the latter refers to the past and creation time, and is not inclusive of the present or the future. Dreamtime lacks the complexity of understanding Aboriginal belief as a way of living and perceiving the world.
- Terms such as *fables*, *legends* and *myths* should be avoided when referring to The Dreaming or to Dreaming or Creation stories.
- There are similarities and differences between Aboriginal cultures and languages and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages. These diversities need to be recognised.

- When discussing or describing Indigenous Australian cultures or lifestyles terms such as *primitive, nomadic, walkabout, wandering, uncivilised* etc. should not be used. Historical texts may use these descriptions and this terminology should be critically analysed. Terms such as *complex, sustainable, diverse, civilised, established, purposeful movement* and so on should be used.
- Torres Strait Islander peoples refer to traditional stories as *legends*. *Dreaming stories* are not a description of stories belonging to the Torres Straits.
- Regional names are often used to collectively identify Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples with each other. Some names include: *Koori (NSW), Murri (Southern QLD), Western Islander (From Western Islands in the Torres Straits), Buma (Northern QLD)* etc. These terms are mainly used by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are not generally used by non-Indigenous people.